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ABSTRACT

College-bound high school seniors and their parents too often choose their undergraduate institutions not on the basis of teaching caliber, but on the strength of the perceived academic credential. Faculty understand that in higher education, value and prestige attach first to research, second to teaching graduate and advanced professional students, third to teaching traditional-aged undergraduates in traditional college settings, and last to teaching non-traditional learners. Graduate schools are more intent on producing paradigm-busters than in training teachers for undergraduate programs. From these concerns has grown a national colloquy demanding good teaching. Publicly defined programs of assessment and regulation, alone, cannot bring about necessary improvements in college teaching. Creating a market for good teaching begins with having the faculty assume shared responsibility for the sum of their teaching activities. Persuading the faculty to do so requires strong voices from the top. Useful arenas for voicing the demand for good teaching include the hiring process and the tenure and promotion process. The greatest opportunity for reform lies in the training of graduate students who plan to become faculty. Prospective faculty should have teacher training included as an explicit part of their graduate education. Recommendations are offered to improve college instruction. (JDD)

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— P — O — L — I — C — Y —

PERSPECTIVES

The Pew Higher Education Research Program
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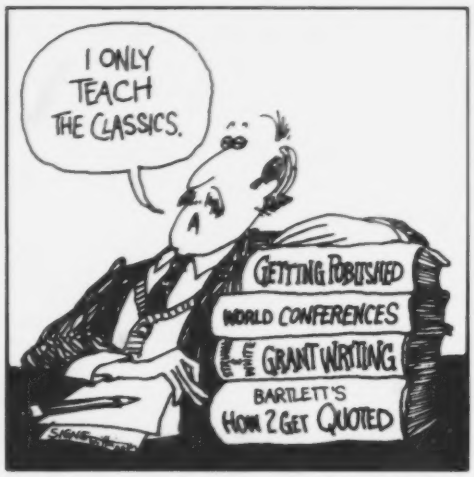
Back to Business



Economists have a habit of asking tough questions in uncompromising ways. Whenever our Roundtable has drifted into a discussion of mechanisms that might encourage better teaching, our colleague Lewis Solmon brings us up short by observing, "If there were really a demand for good teaching, there would be an expanding market for institutions and individuals who consistently deliver excellent instruction." Lew's point yields a devastatingly simple question: Where is the pent-up demand for quality instruction in higher education? Who are the customers demanding good teaching?

The answer is: "Not college-bound high school seniors or their parents, especially those who apply for admission to one of the nation's selective institutions that set the tone for so much of American higher education." What matters most to this traditional market, as deans of admission will tell you, is institutional prestige. "Institution attended" has become a proxy for intellectual promise and future status. Too often, students—particularly the young and best-prepared—choose their undergraduate institutions not on the basis of teaching caliber, but rather on the strength of the perceived academic credential. They seek to position themselves for the best-paying jobs or admission to the more prestigious graduate and professional schools.

The common instinct is to correlate the strength of the academic credential with the prestige of the faculty, which in turn is most easily calibrated in terms of scholarly visibility. It is not just the faculty, but their institutions and, at least indirectly, the consuming public, that contribute to the ethos that places a premium on research and publication at the expense of teaching effectiveness. When publicly presenting their educational credentials, almost all institutions sun themselves in the light of their faculty's scholarly standing. For good and practical reasons, colleges and universities implicitly place a higher value on research stars than on good teachers.

Even when good teaching is of prime importance it seldom generates sufficient demand to change the focus of the enterprise. The segment of the market most concerned with good teaching is also the fastest-growing, though at the same time the least visible and influential: those part-time, often intermittent adult and non-traditional learners who are becoming higher education's new majority. Institutions that serve this market have a strong incentive to teach well, given that so many of their students are inherently skeptical and keenly aware of how well or poorly the course material answers to their immediate needs.

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These students intuitively ask the right questions: "Is this course worth the time I spend away from my family and other responsibilities?" "Should I come again next week or forget it?" "Will these people deliver the kind of quality educational program their brochures promise?"

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The growth of programs enrolling this new majority, however, has not substantially altered the basic configuration of values and incentives that remains at the center of higher education's agenda. There are at best a handful of institutions that can celebrate their ability to provide quality instruction to non-traditional students. Most educational programs for adult learners still use modes of delivery designed principally for traditional-aged students attending traditionally configured institutions. With good reason, faculty at all institutions understand that in higher education, value and prestige attach first to research, second to teaching graduate and advanced professional students, third to teaching traditional-aged undergraduates in traditional college settings, and last to teaching the new majority.

Graduate schools are more intent on producing paradigm-busters than in training teachers who can instill in undergraduates the challenge of both a particular discipline and the general pursuit of learning.

It is, however, in the training of future faculty that the weakness of demand for good teaching in higher education is most evident. There is a sad irony in the fact that many of those who pursue graduate study were first inspired in college by a superior teacher who personified the challenges and rewards of intellectual pursuit. The culture of graduate school transforms that passion for discovery and knowledge into a more practical, even cynical concern to carve a niche in a particular specialty. Research, publication, and professional practice, rather than instruction, become primary objectives from an early point in one's graduate training; the necessity of teaching undergraduates in this pressured environment comes to be regarded as a tedious impediment, a necessary but distracting means to secure financial support while earning a doctorate. "Don't let teaching get in the way of your dissertation" is the remark repeatedly heard around graduate student tables across higher education.

These values are learned from faculty who are themselves primarily concerned with shaping the perimeters of knowledge and professional practice and only secondarily concerned with providing undergraduates with the fundamentals for a life of learning. Graduate schools are more intent on producing paradigm-busters than in training teachers who can instill in undergraduates the challenge of both a particular discipline and the general pursuit of learning.

Not surprisingly, the condition of the undergraduate curriculum itself has come to reflect the absence of a sustaining market for good teaching. As the culture and values of the American professoriate shifted inexorably toward specialized research and publication over the last three decades, both the quantity and quality of thought among faculty at what should constitute a baccalaureate degree h slipped into eclipse. To specify the essential components of an undergraduate education requires a level of dialogue and shared experience among faculty that, in many institutions, is almost non-existent. Student activism in the 1960s and '70s provided the impetus—and in many cases, a convenient excuse—for undergraduate institutions to substantially reduce the general introductory and cross-disciplinary courses that previously had glued together the undergraduate curriculum. Once freed to teach what they wanted—the specialties they knew best—faculty had less reason to talk to one another about what or how they taught. Teaching became even more a matter of personal style and preference, something to let a colleague struggle with on his or her own.

Almost by default, the undergraduate curriculum came to be defined in terms of accumulated course credits, with the students being the principal, often the sole deciders of what made the most sense for them. It became, as the Association of American Colleges' *Integrity in the College Curriculum* (1985) pointed out, "a supermarket where students are shoppers and professors are merchants of learning." It was not, however, a market that encouraged good teaching. The more that individual faculty defined their principal loyalties in terms of individual specialties and set their sights on national distinction, the more likely their home institutions were to relinquish their identities as places where ideas come together. The result is an academy that is much less likely to see knowledge as a whole.

More than a Murmur

These shifts have not gone without notice. American colleges and universities are increasingly being described as having lost their way. Friends as

well as critics have perceived a drift in mission and growing uncertainty within institutions about the value of their primary products. The touchstone for these concerns is the quality of collegiate instruction and the sense that teaching and learning are no longer the heart of the enterprise.

To higher education's public, teaching is, as we affirmed in the May 1989 *Policy Perspectives*, "the business of the business." The response to that essay—consisting of more than 2,000 written replies, many of them requesting multiple copies—makes clear how many people are ready to talk seriously about college teaching, to pose and seek answers for vexing questions. There is a greater willingness today to say aloud what had formerly been consigned to whispers: "It may be, after all, that higher education no longer knows what should be taught or how to teach it!"

From these concerns has grown a national colloquy that is proving remarkably candid and diagnostic in character. That discussion has already yielded a better understanding of the first steps necessary to a meaningful revitalization of the teaching function. It is from this colloquy, rather than from higher education's student consumers, that the demand for good teaching is most likely to emerge.

Some have argued that the debate and resulting demand must inevitably mean increased public regulation. The more extreme and frustrated exponents of reform call for the licensing of professors and the curtailing of state appropriations to institutions that cannot demonstrate a broad commitment to good teaching. Most critics would settle for increased assessment and accountability. Legislation enacted this year in New Mexico, for example, requires each of the State's publicly financed colleges and universities to submit an "Annual Report Card" including:

> (1) the results of the institution's learner outcomes assessment program and steps taken to improve learner outcomes; (2) the retention rate of students; (3) the percent of lower division instructional courses taught by full professors; (4) the number of hours per student per semester spent by faculty members in student advisement.

Each of these measures focuses in one way or another on the issue of how faculty spend their time in relation to the educational needs of students. The signal that such a statement sends is clear: the State of New Mexico values effective teaching and expects it to occur in the educational institutions it supports.

By themselves, however, publicly defined programs of assessment and regulation cannot bring about the improvement in college teaching that the state legislatures are seeking. Such improvement is more likely to result from state insistence upon institutional commitments to self-assessment. The alternative to encouraging institution-based assessment is the development of measures that document how bad the product is rather than yielding programs to make it better; such assessment is about score-keeping, not quality control. If the emerging national colloquy on the quality of college teaching finds its only effective voice to be that of public regulation, then American higher education will have failed to understand why the public came to demand such regulation in the first place.

Changing the Academic Culture

The alternative is for the leaders of the nation's colleges and universities to take up the challenge, much as they have taken up the challenge of controlling costs and restraining prices in the face of a sustained public outcry. Responsibility rests with those most in charge—beginning with trustees, presidents, chancellors, deans, department chairs, and senior faculty. In practical terms, it means their giving voice to the demand for good teaching and then applying pressure to those levers that can encourage faculty to assume greater collective responsibility for the quality of instruction and of the curriculum across their institutions. This process begins with the leaders of institutions of higher education asking the right questions and setting the best examples—and ultimately by holding the faculty accountable.

Good teaching depends on a sense of intellectual community, a common commitment of scholars to approach learning as an integrative rather than a disaggregative enterprise. Just as good teaching stimulates students to learn from one another, so must it grow out of a collective commitment on the part of the faculty to be teachers and students to one another. Fueling the demand for good teaching requires a reversal of the trend that over the decades has turned students into consumers and faculty into providers of separately wrapped packages of information and

skills. Creating a market for good teaching begins with having the faculty assume *shared* responsibility for the sum of their teaching activities—and, in the end, that means individual faculty members coming to know *firsthand* how their colleagues teach.

Changing the culture will prove all the more difficult because in academia, perhaps more than any of the learned professions, the professionals themselves define the culture they inhabit. The academic freedom of faculty has protected them not just from external interference, but from internal controls; they take orders from no one, least of all their peers and colleagues. They prize their independence, their ability to define for themselves how best to teach and the kinds of scholarship they wish to pursue. They have nearly absolute power over the curriculum, which in the modern academy more often means the power to preserve their independence of action, rather than the power to decide collectively on what ought to be taught and by whom.

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Persuading the faculty to take more collective responsibility for the quality of their instructional programs requires strong voices from the top. An eloquent public affirmation by a president and an ongoing strategy committing the full power of his or her administration to quality teaching as a central priority can begin to alter the expectations of students, alumni, and benefactors of the institution—and hence the faculty. Donald Kennedy's highly publicized address to the Academic Council at Stanford University in April 1990 signalled the need for better teaching, not just at Stanford, but across all of higher education. We note, somewhat wistfully, that the impact would have been even greater if President Kennedy's proclamation had included specific steps to improve teaching—such as a prior agreement by Stanford departments to increase the effort they devote to undergraduate education, or more simply, to increase teaching loads, or perhaps to change the requirements for tenure. If the presidents of a dozen institutions of similar stature were to take equally strong stands on the need for improved teaching and greater faculty commitment to the undergraduate curriculum—and to back up rhetoric with action—it would mark a critical turning point.

Trustees can, in turn, impart substantial leadership in the questions that they direct to the officers of the colleges and universities in their charge: "Who is responsible for ensuring that our institution delivers good teaching?" "Has teaching quality improved or declined in the past 20 years?" "Do faculty spend more or less time with students than before?" "If they spend less time, how are they spending the portions of time they formerly spent teaching?" "Is the increased emphasis on publishing occurring at the expense of student learning?" "Has the institution lost sight of its mission to teach undergraduates?"

More prosaic but equally powerful is the influence that institutional leaders—presidents, chancellors, provosts, deans—exert on the hiring process. In many institutions, including virtually all smaller colleges and universities, chief academic and executive officers take an active part in interviewing final candidates for faculty positions. It is here that the institutional commitment to teaching must begin in earnest. The interview ought to be an occasion during which the candidate is asked to *teach* about his or her dissertation. Candidates who cannot explain the topic and the importance of their research to someone not trained in the same discipline are likely not to have thought about the ways in which specific and general knowledge combine in the teaching act.

Candidates ought to be asked quite simply, "Are you a good teacher?" The question phrased in this way may catch candidates off guard, leading them to respond with either an impulsive, bravura "yes" or a candid statement of the successes and failures they have experienced in the classroom. The second type of response is more promising than the first to an institution seeking a good teacher. "Why are you a good teacher?" will shed further light on how carefully the candidate has thought through and applied the principles of effective pedagogy in a particular discipline. "What are your long-range objectives?" "What makes you want to teach here?" "What will you require from your colleagues?" "What are your ideas about curricular change and reform?" The single-minded goal of "publishing my way to better things and the heck with teaching" is never expressed overtly in these interviews, but the candidate who can

give only vague answers to these questions may well harbor just that intention. Proceed with caution.

Senior officers of institutions exert mainly a veto power in the hiring of faculty. It is a real power, nonetheless, and one that can be effective not only in the immediate sense of screening those who will not teach well but in the larger signal it sends that the institution's leadership expects quality teaching of the faculty.

The hiring process constitutes a useful arena for voicing the demand for good teaching, precisely because it is the point of least resistance. The more difficult and consequential change will result from senior officers taking a more active part in tenure and promotion decisions. The true act of institutional leadership will be that of the provost, dean, department chair, or senior faculty member who inquires actively into a tenure candidate's teaching performance and places that performance on an unbiased scale against the candidate's research. Granting tenure to the superior teacher who chooses to focus on teaching rather than research will go a long way toward changing how faculties measure their worth. The same kinds of questions posed at tenure time continue to pertain during promotion review. Promoting faculty who teach well above those who do not will reinforce the message that teaching is no less critical a measure of professional achievement than research productivity.

Granting tenure to the superior teacher who chooses to focus on teaching rather than research will go a long way toward changing how faculties measure their worth.

Separately, each set of questions posed by trustees, institutional leaders, deans, and senior faculty members can help create the demand for good teaching. Taken together, they offer a powerful inducement, the kind that few faculty are likely to ignore.

We understand that often the reluctance to assume such leadership results from competition among peer institutions. It takes little to imagine a president responding to our exhortations, "Sure, I could stir the pot in my institution, but the minute I did, any one of a dozen peer institutions would come recruiting my best faculty—and many of them would leave." Institutional leadership ultimately must come to mean something more than the single college or university acting to reinvigorate the teaching mission. It must connote peer institutions acting in concert to redefine what is meant by a first-rate faculty in higher education.

Focusing on the Future Professoriate

Perhaps the greatest opportunity for reform, and for reinforcing that sense of collective responsibility for instruction on which good teaching depends, lies in the training of graduate students. It is during these years that future faculty develop and hone the instincts that define the academic culture. Changing that culture means altering the attitude that regards graduate study as an occasion to train research scholars first, teachers last. Restructuring graduate degree programs to include an explicit teaching component would be a substantial step in restoring a balance between the mission of discovering new knowledge and that of educating new minds.

Today, most graduate students learn to teach in a vacuum. Assigned to teach an undergraduate course, they are often sent into the classroom without any substantial guidance or supervision, disconnected from the faculty as well as from each other. The prevailing assumption is that advanced knowledge of a subject is itself a sufficient preparation to teach students. The teaching act is to follow naturally from achievement in the discipline; advanced degree-holders or candidates are largely content with believing that one simply teaches by doing.

This attitude of being somehow above conscious pedagogy stems in part from the refusal of most faculty to see themselves as part of a single educational enterprise that includes primary and secondary school teachers. It is as if the professoriate's stature suffers irretrievably by association with those Ichabod Cranes of the lower ranks who merely teach. Nonetheless, the process of teacher preparation for K-12 offers some insights that higher education needs to consider. Primary and secondary teachers are trained explicitly to teach. While requirements vary depending on the certifying state, teaching candidates are generally required to gain an understanding of the history and philosophy of education; they study educational psychology and theories of cognitive

development, as well as methods for teaching in a particular discipline.

We recognize that teacher training programs have been a source of almost universal ridicule among educators and non-educators alike. If too much of this instruction has proven to be mindless, the shortcoming resides less in the concepts than in their execution; at the very least, the exposure to the nature of learning provides a basis for building a community of instructors who understand and talk openly about teaching.

Every academic department has the power and responsibility to change the culture of graduate study. Every department can alter the signals it sends to advanced degree candidates by establishing a process that makes quality teaching an explicit as well as a shared goal.

The capstone experience in most teacher training programs is a one-semester term of apprenticeship as a student teacher, during which the candidate is supervised by an experienced teacher in the field. By the time that primary and secondary teachers get their first job, they have spent a considerable amount of time not only contemplating what it means to teach students but practicing different approaches and consciously developing a teaching style.

Nothing could be farther from the practice of training Ph.D.s in most disciplines. In higher education, one "professes" one's subject. It is not beyond the realm of possibility to hear a faculty member proclaim, "I don't teach students, I teach chemistry." The assumption is that students will learn from the plain fact of being in the presence of the knowledge-maker. Teaching often deteriorates into a one-way transmission of information from professor to student. Far too little conscious thought about the method or mode of teaching is required on the professor's part.

A way of changing this circumstance is to make teacher training an explicit part of graduate education. Departments of English in many institutions have taken a lead in incorporating principles of pedagogy into the training of their Ph.D. candidates. In part because of the interactive nature of the discipline, which places a high value on class discussion, and in part because of the heavy service component that English departments assume in the form of freshman writing courses, it is now an accepted principle that English Ph.D.s should spend at least two years teaching undergraduates under some form of faculty supervision as part of their training. First-year graduate teaching assistants in this field are often required to enroll in a pedagogical methods seminar. There they meet regularly with their peers and one or more members of the faculty not only to consider applicable theories of teaching, learning, and writing, but to discuss strategies and compare teaching experiences using materials from a common syllabus.

Some graduate programs extend the supervision and review of teaching performance beyond the candidate's first semester. At the University of Pennsylvania, teaching assistants in the Department of English are assigned different faculty observers each semester who review the syllabus, the choice of readings, the frequency and nature of assignments and tests, the grading practices, and the effectiveness of classroom technique as based on two or more actual visits during the semester. This arrangement provides a graduate student with a basis for continuous review of his or her teaching practice. The sharpening of teaching skills is perceived as an integral part of a candidate's maturing professionalism. The formal reviews compiled by faculty members through successive semesters form the basis for a letter in each student's dossier, written by the English department chair, describing the nature and quality of that student's teaching.

The challenge of preparing graduate students to teach well necessarily differs by discipline. Teaching in the sciences entails a different set of problems from teaching in the humanities (see "Distillations," pp. 3A-8A, 13A-14A). If the quality of education in the humanities suffers from too little consensus about what to teach, the sciences confront the problem of chilling students' interest by placing inadequately trained teaching assistants in courses that are prerequisite to any serious work in the discipline. While the particulars will vary, every academic department has the power and responsibility to change the culture of graduate study. Every department can alter the signals it sends to advanced degree candidates by establishing a process that makes quality teaching an explicit as well as a shared goal. Every faculty member needs to become con-

sciously involved in the training of Ph.D.s who are accomplished as both teachers and scholars. There is nothing demeaning about expending part of one's professional life ensuring that a subsequent generation can experience the challenge of study in a given discipline and the joy of learning that results from an encounter with superior teachers.

Righting the Balance

There is no guarantee of progress in bringing about better-quality teaching in colleges and universities. Indeed, some have argued that the ensuing shortage of faculty in many disciplines augurs poorly for a substantial improvement of college teaching: in the competition for scarce talent, faculty candidates will naturally choose those institutions that offer minimal teaching responsibility and greater research support. The result will be a further shifting of the relative weights given to teaching and research, with the former again losing out to the latter.

Yet without a genuine righting of the balance between the two, the prospect, as Mary Patterson McPherson has observed, is for increasing numbers of undergraduates to proceed through college without encountering any faculty member willing to expend the effort required to teach well and inspire. An even greater cynicism and contempt for teaching could become instilled in future generations of academicians. Never having experienced good teaching, the next generation of faculty would value and aspire to it even less than the present. The loss to students—and to society in general—would be enormous as the joy of learning that comes from superior teaching faded into antiquity.

Faculty need to demand of each other good teaching, just as they have come to demand good research.

The alternative is to exert leadership from within colleges and universities, to tap the potential for guiding and facilitating change that can be provided by the best teachers. Improving the state of teaching in institutions of higher education requires a return to the academy's best instincts and to the Socratic ideal that presumes nothing and then conscientiously seeks to extend the learning experience through dialogue with others. Our premise is that knowledge is something that attains value through its applicability to the concerns and needs of a community; the specialist's imperative to perform research must balance against the imperative to teach students well. The undergraduate curriculum is the index of the faculty's current and collective thinking about the state of knowledge in relation to the state of the community; it needs to become a subject on which faculty focus more of their collective energies.

In practical terms, our recommendations proceed along the same lines:

- Make teaching a central subject of discourse, with institutional leaders taking primary responsibility for the quality of the discussion.
- Make teaching a subject of intellectual curiosity and creativity, providing faculty with a forum for demonstrating the importance of teaching to their disciplines and to one another.
- Create programs that require collaborative teaching within and among departments to stress the importance of context and relation in the acts of learning, thinking, and knowing.
- Make effective teaching a criterion weighted equally with research in the hiring of faculty, as well as in tenure and promotion decisions.
- Make direct investments in teaching and curricular development that parallel the institution's direct investments in research and publication.
- Restructure graduate education to make teaching, the effective packaging of concepts for teaching, and the development of instructional materials central components of degree attainment.

We are not the first to make such recommendations nor to suggest the need to make teaching count. We may, however, be the first to say that there is too little demand for quality instruction—that neither student consumerism nor public regulation in themselves will achieve the necessary revitalization of college teaching. Such revitalization requires a broad

redirection of institutional resources in general and faculty time in particular—a shift in focus that becomes possible once the demand for quality teaching is given an institutional voice. The definition of good teaching itself must be placed in a context that involves faculty who are prepared and motivated to teach and students who are prepared to learn, in an environment that stresses academic standards backed up by a full commitment of institutional resources.

What higher education requires is a sustained as well as sustaining dialogue about the nature and purposes of teaching. Institutional leaders bear principal responsibility for ensuring the intensity and quality of that dialogue. Faculty need to demand of each other good teaching, just as they have come to demand good research; those who fund and support institutions must themselves come to understand the complexity and the difficulty of the task. What is not required are punitive public regulations or a new round of "faculty bashing"—the most likely results if American colleges and universities fail to make undergraduate education a first priority.

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